DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 186 EA 031 877

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TITLE	School and District Leadership. No Child Left Behind Policy Brief.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.; DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.
REPORT NO	ECS-GP-02-02
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	8p.; For related No Child Left Behind Policy Briefs, see EA 031 878-880.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Commission of the States, 700 Broadway, #1200, Denver, CO 80203-3460 ($4). Tel 303-299-3600; Fax: 303-296-8332; Web site: http://www.ecs.org/html. For full text: http://www.ecs.org/ clearinghouse/34/62/3462.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrators; *Boards of Education; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Legislation; *Federal Regulation; Government Publications; *Leadership Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS	*No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

The newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 2001) reflects and reinforces a major shift in thinking about the roles and responsibilities of school board members, district superintendents, and principals. School and district leaders will face substantial challenges as they adjust to ESEA requirements, including pressure to succeed and deal with potential shifts to using test-preparation curricula. ESEA requires that professional development for educational leaders focus more on enhancing instructional leadership capabilities of superintendents and principals rather than on management. There will be, however, new opportunities and resources to increase leadership effectiveness, such as federal Title II funding to reform principal licensure and certification and provide professional development to principals. States have already begun to address ESEA 2001 issues in the area of recruitment, retention, and effective education and professional learning of principals. Some states are also changing working conditions and governance structures so that education leaders can perform their jobs more efficiently. This policy brief concludes with some key policy questions for states to consider as they put ESEA 2001 into effect and a short list of resources for further understanding of ESEA 2001. (RT)

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No Child Left Behind Policy Brief

School and District Leadership

By Katy Anthes

This is the first in a series of ECS reports examining the impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the newly revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act on state policy and policymaking. Upcoming reports will focus on accountability, school choice, literacy, teaching quality and state information systems.

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EA031877

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Changing Expectations, New Challenges

The newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) both reflects and reinforces a major shift in thinking about the roles and responsibilities of school board members, district superintendents and principals. More and more, school and district leaders are being held responsible for bringing about change and improvement. They are under growing pressure to increase achievement across the board, narrow the test-score gap between disadvantaged and advantaged students and make sure all teachers are of high quality.

Today, expectations for principals and superintendents run well beyond managing budgets and making sure the buses run on time. They are counted on to be the instructional leaders of their schools and districts: to understand effective instructional strategies, regularly observe and coach classroom teachers, and be able to analyze student achievement data to make more effective instructional decisions.

The new ESEA puts more pressure on the public education system to increase student achievement for all students. Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, the law authorizes a series of consequences for schools, districts and states that do not raise student achievement. Schools and districts that fail to meet goals will be required to offer families other school choices, give additional support services to low-income families, replace school staff, decrease management authority at the school level, implement new curricula or change the school's governance structure. Much of the pressure of these consequences rests directly on superintendents, school boards and principals. They will be held accountable for ensuring all groups of students – economically disadvantaged, racial or ethnic minorities, students with disabilities and English language learners – make state-defined "annual yearly progress" targets.

School and district leaders will face substantial challenges as they adjust to the ESEA requirements, including:

Pressure to succeed. The greater demands and expectations placed on school leaders to raise student achievement will undoubtedly make both recruitment and retention of principals and superintendents an even tougher job than it is today. Superintendents and principals also will have the added responsibility of maintaining staff morale and assisting staff in dealing with the stress and public scrutiny that tougher accountability measures are sure to bring.

Technical skills and capabilities. The growing focus on testing will require that school leaders have a deep understanding of assessment instruments and systems. They will need to know what tests can and cannot tell them, what type of assessments are best for diagnostic purposes, and which supplemental assessments might be necessary to identify performance gaps. In turn, school leaders will need

to be master teachers (or at least surround themselves with a team of master teachers) so that they are able to translate assessment data into effective instructional strategies for their school staff.

Narrowing of the curriculum. One potential unintended consequence of the ESEA law might be that some schools are tempted to shift to "drill and practice" or test-preparation curricula. School and district leaders need to be aware of the many rich curriculum strategies that can be employed to help students increase learning – without resorting to curriculum narrowing. Leaders need to be strong in the face of intense pressure to raise test scores, and remember the importance of maintaining a robust, comprehensive curriculum.

Leader expectations. In most states, the evaluation of superintendents and principals and especially school board members is not a clear and explicitly stated process. Under the new ESEA, school districts will need to explicitly define what is expected from – and how they will evaluate – school leaders. What measures will be used to determine a principal's effectiveness – student test scores, dropout rates, a decrease in the achievement gap? Clear communication about what is expected will help focus school leaders' attention on the overall state and district vision for school improvement.

Preparation and professional development. One of the main implications of the new ESEA law is that professional development is now not only focused on teachers, but also aimed at developing the instructional leadership capabilities of superintendents and principals. For districts and schools to make this shift – from management to instructional leadership – they must consider whether preparation programs are adequately equipping school leaders to take on this role, and whether professional development opportunities are sufficient to help them continuously develop and refine their skills.

As states gear up to implement ESEA 2001, it will be crucial for them to ensure that appropriate support structures and tools are in place to assist leaders in overcoming these challenges. For example:

- Additional staff support might be necessary to allow principals to focus on instructional leadership and teacher mentoring.
- Mentors or counselors might be used to provide new principals with professional assistance and support.
- Leaders must have access to user-friendly, accurate data on which to base decisions that will guide their districts and schools.
- Leaders must know where they can turn if their school or district needs help with specific problems such as selecting instructional programs, hiring qualified

staff, developing effective professional development opportunities or maintaining staff focus and morale.

Finally, policymakers and the public must recognize and accept that it takes time for the system (states, districts and schools) to respond to large-scale changes. New leadership must be given time to make changes and produce results.

New Opportunities and Resources for Leadership Development

ESEA 2001 offers states new opportunities and resources to increase the effectiveness of their school leadership ranks. A key component of the new law is the inclusion of principals in the Title II, Part A, Sec. 2102 portion of the legislation. States may now use federal Title II training and recruiting funds to:

- Reform principal licensure and certification
- Establish, expand or improve alternative routes to principal certification
- Target efforts at recruiting highly qualified principals
- Develop merit-based performance systems
- Provide professional development to principals.

The new law grants states and districts more money, as well as greater flexibility in terms of where and how they spend it. Superintendents will be able to select the most effective programs for their district and allocate the necessary funds to support those programs. For instance, one district might decide to spend more money on the Safe and Drug Free Schools program; another may find that investments in technology or professional development for teachers and principals is more useful.

These extra resources will allow states to consider and investigate policies that can affect leadership recruitment, preparation and retention. With the support of private foundations, a number of states (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia) have begun comprehensively rethinking their approaches to recruiting and developing education leaders. Other states may want to take a closer look at what these states are doing to "jump-start" change and improvement. The State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) is working with 15 states to explore policies that promote high-quality school leadership. Participating states, leadership policy issues and initiative contacts can be found on ECS' Web site, http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/projects.asp?am=7.

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State Policy Trends

Many states have already begun thinking about and working on solutions to the issues that will be intensified by ESEA 2001. In the area of **recruitment and retention,** for example, states are:

- Creating leadership academies and other programs aimed at encouraging excellent teachers to become building principals.
- Developing alternative recruitment and preparation routes for nontraditional candidates for school leadership positions. One model being considered by states is New Leaders for New Schools, which provides experienced members of the business community with the additional skills needed to lead in a public school and district environment.
- Exploring mentoring programs to give new principals and superintendents the support they need in their first years on the job, when turnover is typically high.
- Developing recruiting programs that target populations of color for leadership positions.

To address the need for **effective education and professional learning** for principals, superintendents and school board members, some states are:

- Developing standards for school leaders that will be integrated into preparation programs and professional development models. Among the standards frameworks being used are the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders, the American Association of School Administrators Professional Standards for the Superintendency and the National Association of Elementary School Principals standards. Many states are tailoring these standards to their specific needs and circumstances. Some states and districts have engaged business leaders in the process of developing standards for the next generation of school leadership.
- Considering policies that allow a principal or superintendent to practice without the traditional master's, Ph.D. or Ed.D. credentials. States are exploring, among other things, alternative preparation programs, leadership academies and the modification of existing licensure and certification requirements.
- Creating professional development models that support the continued learning of school leaders in areas such as data analysis and decisionmaking, the selection and evaluation of teachers, and instructional observation and coaching techniques.

In the area of **licensure, certification and preparation program accreditation systems,** states are:

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- Redesigning their licensure system to reflect new standards for school leaders.
- Creating a licensure or certification assessment for superintendents and principals.
- Redesigning the preparation program accreditation system. Many states are now defining what skills principal candidates must have, and are linking a program's accreditation to its effectiveness in teaching those skills.

In order to create a **working environment and governance structure** in which education leaders can perform their jobs efficiently and effectively, some states are:

- Changing salary schedules and compensation policies to make leadership positions more attractive to capable and qualified candidates
- Creating induction and mentoring programs for superintendents and principals to foster a working environment in which leaders feel supported and guided.
- Considering ways to give more authority to principals. In a recent study by Public Agenda, principals expressed concern about not having the authority to hire school staff or control school budgets, especially when they are held accountable for school improvement. This is a particularly complicated issue, one that requires balancing a school leader's right to select the people that his or her success depends on and teachers' rights as defined in their contract agreements.
- Exploring the idea of "distributed leadership teams" for districts and schools. Such teams offer flexibility in terms of resource allocation and delineation of roles and responsibilities.
- Reviewing and redefining the relationship between school boards and superintendents, and offering training on how to create a productive district leadership team.
- Investing in systems that can help leaders collect, analyze and use data to make instructional decisions.

Key Policy Questions

- Do state policies related to recruitment and retention promote an increase in the quantity and quality of the school and district leadership candidate pool?
- Do state policies on school and district governance and working conditions allow for leaders who can increase student achievement in their schools?
- Does your state's preparation program and licensure system prepare and credential the amount and type of skilled professionals necessary under ESEA?

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School and District Leadership (cont'd)

This *Brief* was written by **Katy Anthes**, policy analyst, Education Commission of the States. Anthes is funded on the State Action for Education Leadership project by the Wallace Reader's Digest Funds.

Preparation of this policy brief was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the department.

- What is your state's capacity to support leaders who are in charge of designated low-performing schools? What professional development systems will be in place to help them?
- What leadership efforts in your state have been successful? Have any low-performing schools become high-performing schools? What are ways states can facilitate sharing strategies with other education leaders in low-performing districts?
- Does the state have the capacity to collect the kind of data that will answer the above questions?

Conclusion

As states explore various strategies for improving the effectiveness of their school and district leaders, the policy issues outlined in this brief should be considered in light of their particular needs, circumstances and aspirations. The alignment of a state's assumptions, goals and policies related to accountability, assessment, teacher quality, finance and governance are crucial to creating a comprehensive education system that ensures all leaders succeed, all teachers succeed and all students succeed.

Resources

ECS has available several publications that summarize and explain ESEA 2001 and President Bush's *No Child Left Behind* proposal.

No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001 – Summarizes the ESEA 2001 law, looks at where the states stand in regard to requirements of the new law and suggests policy questions to consider when deciding how to respond to ESEA. (GP-02-01), 70 pages, $12.50 plus postage and handling.

Building on Progress: How Ready Are States To Implement President Bush's Education Plan? – Examines how prepared states are to implement the new ESEA. Looks at state efforts to date in testing, standards, choice, school safety, rewards and sanctions, and other issues. (GP-01-01), 20 pages, $6.50 plus postage and handling.

A Closer Look: State Policy Trends in Three Key Areas of the Bush Education Plan - Testing, Accountability and School Choice – Provides a detailed look at where states stand in assessing student performance, motivating and assisting low-performing schools, and providing school choice options. (GP-01-02), 36 pages, $6.50 plus postage and handling.

For additional information on the issues discussed in this policy brief, visit the ECS Leadership Issue Site at http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueID=158. To learn more about the State Action for Education Leadership (SAELP) project and state activities, visit the SAELP Web site at http://www.ccsso.org/edleadership.html.

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